

Loving Your Brother in Missions and Evangelism

Tertullian was a Christian who lived around A.D. 200, about the time the Roman empire was at its peak. The Romans regarded the Christians as troublemakers, foolish, weird. They spread rumours that the Christians were cannibals. They joked about Christians worshipping a crucified criminal. They blamed the problems in Rome and the weakness of Rome on Christianity. Many would not give the Christians the time of day when it came to sharing the message of salvation. But there was one thing which gripped the hearts of the Romans. Tertullian wrote of that in one of his books. He gives the distinguishing marks of Christians, the peculiarities. After describing briefly how they worship, and how they administer themselves, he says this:

“But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘Behold,’ they say, ‘how they love one another, ...how they are ready even to die for one another.’” Here was a watching world looking on, and the observation they made was “Behold how they love each other.”

Behold, how they love. This love for fellow Christian was one of the most powerful witnesses to the watching world. It can still be.

We've been considering how the greatest motive for evangelism and missions is love. Not guilt. Not duty. Not shame. Not even pity. 2 Corinthians 5:14 says it is the love of Christ that constrains us.

We have considered two loves which are essential to evangelism and missions: love for God, and love for your neighbour. Loving God is first, and ultimate. You must love His fame, His will and His sacrifice if you want an enduring witness. Loving neighbour is second. We considered what this means: loving the person most unlike you and everyone in-between, by showing them the mercy you would want for yourself. We come now to the third love which is behind evangelism and missions: loving your brother and sister in Christ.

When we think of evangelism and missions, we don't tend to think of loving the church. After all, the church is comprised of those who have *already* accepted the gospel. What has loving my fellow Christian got to do with evangelism and missions?

It's a dangerous time, because many people filled with that mindset do not realise that the gospel, evangelism and salvation are not to be divorced from the local church. God saves us individually, but what He joins us into is corporate. He saves His church one member at a time, but does not mean one member is the church by himself or herself. The Bible does not describe us as homing pigeons, the Bible describes us as sheep. Sheep go in groups, and sheep need shepherds.

Loving the church is crucial to evangelism and missions. It is not only because the church preserves and protects and proclaims the gospel, it is because the church, when loving one another like we are supposed, becomes part of the message we proclaim. If we do not love one another, we remove one of the most powerful tools for evangelism there is. I want you to see from Scripture three ways in which loving your brother or sister is a motive for, and a means of, evangelism.

I. Loving Your Brother Shows a Picture of the Gospel

1 John 4:10-12 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us

In this Scripture, John says something very significant: No one has seen God at any time. That is, no one has seen the invisible essence of God. However, he says, if we Christians love one another, the presence of God *is* seen, His love is revealed and shown.

When people wanted to see a religion's gods, they would go to the Temple. Almost every religion has a great temple to point to. When the followers of a religion wanted to show off the grandeur of their God, they would give them a tour of their god's temple. Christianity does not have a temple

like that, and never has. In Christianity, the temple is not a building, it is the people.

1 Corinthians 3:16 ¹⁶ *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

Ephesians 2:21 *in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,*

So, let's say you wanted to give an unbeliever a tour of the majesty and goodness of God. Where would you take him? Answer: to God's Temple. Where is that? It is being among God's people. Why will that reveal God? Because as John just said, when we love one another, God abides in us. His character is seen, His nature is seen. In fact, the gospel itself, that we want to share in evangelism and missions, is seen.

1 John 3:16-18 *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

John is very clear: God showed what love is by sacrificing for us. If He did that for us, we ought to do it for each other. Not just in theory, but in deed. The gospel is that Christ died for unworthy sinners to give them what they need. When Christians sacrifice to meet the needs of other Christians, the watching world sees a mini-portrait of the gospel. We die to self, we give up our needs to help one another. We practise God's kind of love on one another.

One of the strongest beliefs in Filipino culture is *utang na loob*. That means you must pay back, or reciprocate when you've been done a good turn. The people in the tribe cannot understand when Philip does something for them and expects nothing in return.

To a certain degree, the whole unsaved world operates on that principle. You do good in order to receive it back. But the gospel is that God loved people who would not repay Him, and never be able to repay Him. Christian love is dying to self to meet the needs of others in the body, even when they don't say thank you or deserve it or appreciate or even realise it. We do it because Christ loved us in this way. And when the world sees that, they see a little bit of the gospel. They are forced to ask – what drives you Christians? Why do you love like this? How do you love like this?

A man by the name of Aristides wrote a defence of Christianity to the Romans emperor Hadrian before the year 138. Listen to what he said of Christians : ““and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.”

That's why James says that pure religion is this:

James 1:27 ²⁷ *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

Why? Because orphans and widows cannot pay you back. They are destitute. The kind of love that loves them is gospel love. And when the world sees it, it knows it is seeing gospel love.

George Muller was used by God to begin five orphan houses and cared for thousands of orphans, trusting only in what God would provide. When he died, his funeral procession showed something of what the world had seen in him. The biographer, Pierson, writes,

“The funeral, which took place on the Monday following, was a popular tribute of affection, such as is seldom seen. Tens of thousands of people reverently stood along the route of the simple procession; men left their workshops and offices, women left their elegant homes or humble kitchens, all seeking to pay a last token of respect. Bristol had never before witnessed any such scene...After the memorial service, the procession silently formed. Among those who followed the coffin were four who had been occupants of that first orphan home in Wilson Street. The children's grief melted the hearts of spectators, and eyes unused to weeping were moistened that day.”

When we love one another, and love each other in this way, the world sees a picture of the gospel. Consider for a moment what part you are playing, in painting that picture for unbelievers. Are you a part of that? It is wonderful to be on the receiving end, but if we are all waiting for it to happen to us, it will never happen. How is your sacrificial love for *this* body? Are you involved? Do you know the needs? Do you stay to pray in the second service? Do you give? Do you phone? Do you visit? Do you encourage? Do you help materially? Are you a living testimony to the gospel in this church?

John 13:34-35 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

There is another way that our for love one another becomes part of our motive and our means of evangelising.

II. Loving Your Brother Shows the Power of the Gospel

Ephesians 2:11-18 ¹¹ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him

Before Jesus came, there is one thing you would never have seen: Jews and Gentiles, occupying the same room, and worshipping together. The Jews prided themselves in their Law, their ritual cleanliness, their nation's antiquity, their religion. They had no dealings with Gentiles. Gentiles were not to sit at table with Jews and eat together. Gentiles were not allowed beyond a certain point in the Temple precincts on threat of death. Jews regarded Gentiles as unclean.

Gentiles prided themselves on their philosophy, their Graeco-Roman culture, their wisdom. They looked upon Jews as arrogant. Gentiles regarded the fastidious law-keeping of the Jews as hypocrisy. They despised their self-righteousness. Their aloofness and arrogance only rubbed more salt into the wound. Furthermore, it seems that by the first century, Jews had become the money-lenders of the world. Therefore, Gentiles often had to reluctantly turn to Jews to borrow money, which made them hate them even more. They used the Jews, but despised them.

There is no way that you would find these two groups together, sharing one table, worshipping the same God. But according to these Scriptures, that's what the gospel did. Verse 14 says Jesus Himself became the peace between the two groups, making the two one, tearing down the wall of separation, removing all that separated the two. He removed the enmity, and brought both groups to the level ground of the cross.

This is the power of the gospel fleshed out for the world to see. And it was not only Jew and

Gentile.

Colossians 3:11 ¹¹ *where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*

Galatians 3:28 ²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*

In a Christian congregation, slaves and masters could be worshipping together. Cultured Greek and unlearned Barbarian. Males and females were together. These were impermeable barriers in the ancient world. When an unbeliever came into a church and saw this, they were seeing the power of the gospel to strip us of our pride, bring us to something bigger than ourselves – Christ, and fill our hearts with love for each other.

The same is true today. The world is full of ways to try to bring about warring groups – negotiated settlements, compromises, bartering, anger management, mediating parties, peacekeeping forces, and so on. But only the power of the gospel brings true unity. And the church is the place to flesh that out.

Sergeant Jacob DeShazer was an American pilot during World War II. While bombing Japan, his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire. He bailed out and was captured. He was placed in a 1.5 metre wide cell in a prison camp. He was brutally and cruelly tortured, he developed an intense hatred for his Japanese captors, and lived for the day he could take revenge. One day, a Bible made it into the prison camp. It was passed around, and DeShazer read it eagerly. When he came to Christ's words on the cross, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do", his heart melted. He trusted Christ. He began treating his captors differently. When the war was over, and he was back in the United States, he decided to become a missionary and return to Japan.

His story was printed on a tract. One day a Japanese man who was dejected and depressed was given that tract. He sought out the missionaries who had printed that, sought out the Bible, and came to Christ. His name was Captain Mitsuo Fuchita, and he was the man who led the Japanese forces to attack Pearl Harbour. He, in turn, became a missionary, and went to America with the gospel. Time magazine reported this remarkable story. The world sees what only the gospel can do. Only the gospel can bring forgiveness and unity.

One of the powerful testimonies to the gospel is unity. And it is best seen in the church. When a people of great diversity come together, and forbear with one another; forgive one another; suffer long with one another; are patient with one another; speak no evil of one another; believe the best of one another; are not envious, jealous, malicious, back-biting, slanderous, but kind, generous, sacrificial, comforting, challenging; that speaks of the gospel's transforming power. We see the gospel in each other. And unbelievers see it too.

There is nothing supernatural about mingling with those who are just like you. If, in the church, you are kind to, hospitable to and minister to people to whom you probably would have been friendly before salvation, there's nothing in that which portrays the gospel.

Matthew 5:46-47 *"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"* ⁴⁷ *"And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"*

But when the gospel reaches across languages, ethnic cultures, political divides, former religions, age gaps, gender wars, we see the mighty transforming power of the gospel. Are you part of that? Are you rejoicing in the commonness we have in Christ? If an unbeliever had to take 10 snapshots of you here at church over 10 Sundays, would those 10 snapshots be at all surprising to the world?

John 13:34-35 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."* ³⁵ *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

When we love one another, we show what the gospel is like. When we love one another, we show what the gospel can do. This motivates us to share it more, and it is a tool we use with those who are interested. But there is one more way that loving one another forms part of evangelism and missions:

III. Loving Your Brother Shows the Person of the Gospel

John 17:20-23 *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

Jesus here makes a remarkable statement. He says that when Christians love each other, the world will know that the Father sent the Son, and that the Father loves them as He loves the Son. Unbelievers looking on will learn about who God is. He is a Trinity. The Father loves the Son. The Father also loves the world, as does the Son. So the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Before God ever created the world, He loved. There was eternal love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If the Trinity is thought of as a family, God loved within the Trinity perfectly. Now God adopts us as His children. He becomes our Father. We are, according to Jesus' prayer to reflect that kind of love and unity that has always been in the Trinity.

How will Christians' love for each other show people the truth of God and His gospel? Look again in verses 20 and 21. Jesus wants Christians to be one, as He and the Father are one. Now how are the Father and the Son one? Are they one person? No, they are different persons. But they share one essence. They are both God, as is the Holy Spirit, and they are together God.

In a local church, we are many persons, and yet we are one body. We are different in our likes and dislikes and temperaments and intelligence and emotions. We will never lose our personalities. So what would it mean for us to become one? The Trinity is the analogy. Unity within diversity.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 ⁴ *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.*

We are different, but we partake of what is the same. We are not identical, but we are all connected. The Christian church is supposed to be a living reflection of the relationships within the Trinity. More than one Person, but united in purpose, action, desires.

You can ask any management expert, and he will tell you that one of the most difficult problems in management is welding together so many different personalities to fulfill an organisation's goals. You have all these people with their own desires and ideas and aspirations, pulling in different directions.

An unbeliever is supposed to look into the church and see something which the management books dream about – a huge variety of personalities, diverse, but blending, uniting for a common love.

We are to be one in purpose, one in loves, one in goals and desires and priorities - though we are many persons. When Christians love each other, they do not seek only to do nice things for each other, they seek to tune their minds to believe the same things and love the same things.

How does that happen?

Ephesians 4:1-6 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Notice the reference to the Trinity in verses 3- 6: Spirit, Lord, God and Father. Notice what we have in common: not only the same Spirit, Lord and Father, but the one body, one hope, one faith, one baptism. We have a God-given unity. Verse 3 tells us not to create the unity, but to maintain it. How do we maintain this unity? Look at verse 1 and 2.

We do it with deliberate humility, gentleness, longsuffering and forbearance. We dwell with each other, so that we can learn together. It's as we spend much time with each other, around the Word of God, that we, who are so different, come to believe the same things and love the same things.

Romans 15:5-6 *Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is not something which comes naturally to us. Our culture teaches us that we must fight for our rights. We must make ourselves heard. We must have our own say. I must have a say, and others must know that I had a say. If I don't get my way, then I will either dig my heels in and make life hard, or I will withdraw and sulk,

That kind of individuality is counter-Christian. That kind of individuality is destructive to the body, and will never give people a picture of the Triune God.

Having differing personalities and gifts is a beautiful thing. But Christian love is not about asserting my individuality at the expense of the body. It is not about avoiding the body so that I don't encounter conflict. It is not about sitting on the periphery because things are not being done the way I'm happy with. It's about submitting my mind and heart to the Word of God so that I can with one mouth and heart glorify God. It's about plugging in, and clothing myself with longsuffering humility and meekness for the inevitable disagreements and conflict that will come.

For the sake of your evangelism and missions, do you seek one-mindedness with others? Do you seek unity within the diversity?

Imagine if you could expose the unbelievers in your life to a group which explain and illustrate and expound on the gospel and God without you saying a word. That's what the church is. Our love for each other shows the world what the gospel means, what the gospel can do, and who is the Person behind the gospel. For you to be able to introduce unbelievers to a group of people who sacrificially give to each other without looking for reward; who overcome racial, cultural, ethnic differences and dwell together; who have very different personalities, but are united in mind and heart, that is a powerful tool. Unbelievers who see it are gripped. They are surprised.

³⁵ *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Why do we do evangelism and missions? Because we love God. Because we love our neighbour. And because we love one another. These three motives, put together become a powerful Trinity of loves that will sustain and grow our evangelism and missions.